

Mexican-Cuban relations

Former warmth of ties vanishes under pressure of rising tide of international incidents

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Several heated issues concerning hijackings, political asylum policies, and spy charges have kept Mexican-Cuban relations simmering just below the boiling point for several weeks now.

The issues have also presented another exercise in the type of international diplomacy for which this country is becoming increasingly renowned. The Mexican Foreign Office, under Minister Antonio Carrillo Flores, has adroitly contained the potentially explosive situation while at the same time standing firm against Cuban charges.

But now another flame has been fanned. Unconfirmed reports from the port of Veracruz allege that a Cuban national, speaking before the Mexican-Cuban Juárez-Martí Cultural Relations Institute, promised that Cuba would supply armaments "and all the means" to a Mexican youth movement.

The report, carried by several newspapers, was denied as false by the institute. But it had already prodded editorialists to once again reopen the question of Cuba's sudden unfriendly attitude toward Mexico.

Mexican-Cuban ties began to chafe in mid-summer when, on July 26, the anniversary of the Cuban revolutionary movement, a commercial aircraft on a local flight over Mexico was diverted to Havana by two Mexican citizens.

Identified by authorities

The hijackers, José-David Carrera Vázquez and Maria del Pilar Muñoz Ramos, were identified by Mexican authorities as youths who had participated in last year's student movement.

The Foreign Ministry requested provisional detention of the Mexicans for extradition purposes, basing the petition upon a treaty which dates back to 1925.

According to the pact, extradition need not be granted if the petitioned nation decides the offense involved is of a political nature.

Mexico's request in this case, however, stemmed from an arrest order accusing the students "as suspects of robbery with violence, threats, and illicit deprivation of liberty."

A precedent for such a case was set in 1961 when a French Algerian citizen pirated an international plane flying over Mexican territory. Cuba returned the hijacker to Mexico to stand trial. He is serving an eight-year sentence.

Exonerated by Havana

But between the date of request for detention and the time Mexico formally requested documents for extradition, Cuba announced that a revolutionary tribunal in

Havana had exonerated the Mexican couple of any offense. The government offered them political asylum, contending that "the motives that led them to enter Cuba are of a political nature."

Minister Carrillo Flores, who had been negotiating a special agreement on piracy incidents for several months, refused to unduly publicize the matter. But he assured the press "there has been no accusation against them [the Mexican youths] of any political crimes."

As if to justify the Cuban position, Granma, the Cuban Communist Party official newspaper, charged that over a period of years the Mexican Embassy in Havana had harbored 18 common criminals. (No dates were specified.) It also criticized Mexico for protecting Cubans who had used government boats to flee the island.

This surprising attack drew a low-keyed denial from Mexican Ambassador Miguel Covián Pérez. Mexican editors were rather less tranquil, as they fired off reminders that this country's political asylum policy had protected Premier Fidel Castro when he sought exile as a young revolutionary.

Movie 'Che' barred

Meanwhile, Mexican authorities displayed unwavering doctrine and goodwill by announcing that the 20th Century Fox film "Ché" would be barred from local screening. The picture, purportedly based on the Cuban revolution, was judged "not impartial" by the General Cinematography Board.

But Cuba's unrelenting attitude, plus press comments on both sides, eroded Minister Carrillo Flores' patience. In late August he made public a lengthy communiqué in which Cuba was severely censured for granting asylum with "unnecessary haste" before proper documents had been delivered for study.

CIA ties charged

Mexico's strong note was met with Cuban silence for several days.

Then in early September, the Cuban Government accused an official of the Mexican Embassy in Havana of being an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.). Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa García demanded that Humberto Carrillo Colón, counsellor and press attaché, be turned over to the Cuban courts to face espionage charges.

According to the Cuban charge, Mr. Carrillo Colón had been using a radio transmitter in his residence to send coded messages to the CIA and had sent photographs of military objectives to the United States.

Mexico strongly rejected the Cuban request and Mr. Carrillo Colón flew back to Mexico City together with Foreign Minister

Carrillo Colón, Humberto
CIA - Cuba

Soc. 401.4 Che
Guevara, Ernesto (Che)

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